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15 *pregnancy and birth:*

In Tepoztlán it is considered a sin for a married person not to want to have children and not to accept all those sent by God. It is said, with more or less conviction, that many children are desirable. The most frequently expressed attitude on the part of men and women concerning the advantages of raising a family is that children are a source of labor supply and security for the parents, particularly during old age. Boys are much preferred, because they are economically more productive. Although daughters aid the mother more directly than sons do, the large majority of women express strong preference for boys and favor their sons. Some younger more acculturated people occasionally express a desire to have children because it is "nice" or "less sad" not to be alone, and otherwise indicate that children are a source of emotional satisfaction. This is in contrast with most Tepoztecans, however, for whom the economic usefulness of children is the most obvious advantage in having them.

There is a notable difference in the expressed attitudes of men and women toward having children. Women for the most part "accept" children fatalistically as a burden to be endured. "Having children is our destiny and the will of God . . . it is the duty of every married woman to accept all that come." Another typical statement is the following: "There is no way out, I have a husband. If more children come, what can we do? We will endure it even though like pigs they come one after another." It is common for women to complain at having to bear many children which they believe to be a punishment of God. Women consider themselves fortunate if they do not conceive soon after marriage or after a previous birth. Most women do not want to have more than four children; those who have only one or two, or even none, are envied. Twins are considered a great misfortune.[1] A typical reaction to having twins is, "What, am I a pig to have them this way? It is a terrible punishment of God." Many women actively express interest in birth control. There is no doubt that if such information were available, and if permitted by their husbands, a large number of women would practice birth control. Abor-

[1] A similar attitude toward twins is reported in Chan Kom. Redfield and Villa Rojas, *Chan Kom—a Maya Village* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institute, 1934), Publ. No. 448.

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There is a belief that if an eclipse occurs during a woman's pregnancy, the child will be born with some part of his body missing; that is, it will have been eaten by the moon. To prevent this the mother should wear a pair of scissors under her sash. An earthquake will also cause some physical defect in the child.

There are no diet restrictions for pregnant women. There is a widespread belief that the pregnant woman should satisfy any food whim, otherwise she may suffer a miscarriage or a premature birth, or the baby may be born with skin colorations. Many subsequent difficulties are assigned to the failure to satisfy food whims. It is the husband's obligation to provide his wife with the food she wishes. But women do not make frequent or unreasonable demands, particularly if their husbands are not "good" to them.

Women who are nauseated during the second and third months are treated with herbs which are said to decrease the water in the abdomen. Many women do not take this treatment because of the restriction in diet and movement that follows. They may not go out into the street for three days, they may not go to the fields or to the stream, they may not stand near a water jug.

There are no restrictions on sexual intercourse during pregnancy, and many continue to have intercourse up to the time of birth. No special positions are used in the last months to protect the fetus.

When there are signs of miscarriage, the midwife tries several remedies. The patient may be asked to recline on a *rebozo* or cloth and is then moved or jerked two or three times from one side to another by means of the cloth. Another remedy is to soak an old tortilla in water of *nixtamal* or vinegar and place it on the small of the back. A mixture of the following herbs is also used: *tlatlazcametl*,[6] *camotito de San Diego*,[7] and *muicle*.[8] To this some midwives add wine, chocolate, leaves of *Santa María* (*artemisa*),[9] and a gold earring to be boiled with the mixture. Miscarriages are not frequent, and when one occurs the woman is often blamed for bringing it about by carelessness.

Induced miscarriages are fairly common. But the frequent deaths in such cases deter most women, and it is said that women who try to "cure" themselves will have to account for their behavior on Judgment Day. Miscarriages are said to cause *pelos* or brown discoloration of the skin, so that women who suffer from this are believed to have aborted frequently. To bring on delayed menstruation, many women drink *muicle*. Ground *chayotillos* with salt may be taken, or a tuber *aboyote* may be used. Another way is to use the same preparation which brings on labor. The ingredients are as follows: opossum tail (*tlacuache*), *pimienta gorda*, *sasalik*, and *tlatlazcametl*. Sometimes women will bring about a miscarriage by deliberately lifting heavy objects. Many women, and particularly unmarried girls, secretly go to

[6] *Montanoa tomentosa*, a very well-known plant. See Maximiano Martínez, *Las Plantas Medicinales de México* (México, D. F.: México Ediciones Botas, 1939), p. 330.

[7] Unidentified.

[8] *Jacobinia spicigera*, *ibid.*

[9] Unidentified.

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847 *curanderos* in other villages to "cure" themselves. However, the only approved
842 method of limiting the number of pregnancies is to avoid intercourse as long as possible after the birth of a child.

BIRTH

844 When the baby is expected, a curtain is hung to screen the bed of the expectant mother, and delivery takes place behind this. Poorer families hang up a *petate*. When labor pains begin, the midwife is called. Occasionally the husband will assist the wife, but the majority of women are embarrassed by his presence and insist that he leave. One of the underlying beliefs throughout the delivery is that difficulty is due to "cold" and that "heat" must be applied. The patient lies on a *petate* on the floor, and the midwife massages the abdomen, the back, and the hips, with various
[278] heated oils and unguents. These may be oil of violet, white lily, rosemary or al-
[789] monds, or *altea*, depending upon the midwife. The heat and the massage is to warm the infant, loosen it, and make it slip out more easily.

[278] The patient is then given a mixture of *tlatlaxcametl* with chocolate, sherry, and egg, to make the labor pains stronger, or *pimienta gorda* is boiled and given. The abdomen is massaged and rubbed all the while, and the mother is wrapped in a blanket to make her perspire. A *cenidor*, or sash, may be tightly bound around the waist at this time to keep the back from weakening and the bones from spreading and to prevent hemorrhage later. The patient may kneel at this stage, and the baby is delivered on the *petate* and wrapped by the midwife in a clean, warmed, old cloth. If it is a dry birth, the mother is given more *tlatlaxcametl*. In cases of difficult
845 or delayed births, the family, at the suggestion of the midwife, may buy a candle for
782 the Virgen de Monserrat, the guardian of pregnant women. The patient measures four fingers on the candle, a mark is made at that point with a centavo, and the candle is put before the image. If delivery does not occur before the flame reaches the mark on the candle, the case is considered very grave.

845 Delayed births are sometimes attributed to the fact that the woman does not bear down at the proper time, and attempts are made to eject the child by provoking
[825] nausea and vomiting. This may be achieved by putting a chicken feather or the tail
[278] of an opossum into the woman's mouth.[10] The tail is sometimes cooked and given as a drink. The woman may also be given her husband's urine or the dirty soapy water in which he has washed his hands. It is believed that when a woman in labor breathes out or screams every time she feels pain, the child rises instead of descends. The mother is given something to bite on, usually her braid, and is told to keep her mouth closed. Even speaking is discouraged. It may be such practices, found in
[152] many parts of Mexico, which have led observers to describe Mexican Indian women as stoical during childbirth. In Tepoztlán, women frequently pray and scream when they suffer severe pains, and only the *más valientas* are quiet.

Difficult births and extended labor, sometimes over several days, are not uncom-

[171] [10] In Trintsuntzan, the woman's braid is forced down her throat.

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mon. Without exception, our informants described labor dramatically, with emphasis upon the pain. "It is death to bear a baby" is a common sentiment. Some look back at labor with shuddering and expressions of horror, even fifteen years after the birth of their last child. Midwives report that many mothers are severely frightened during and after delivery and must be calmed by being heated with a smoky fire. *Pericón* or rosemary or laurel, or all three, are burned in an old clay pot, and the strong smelling smoke is directed underneath the blanket to heat the woman's lower parts.

After the child is born, the *cenidor* is tightened around the upper part of the abdomen to prevent the blood and the placenta from rising in the mother and possibly causing her death. If the afterbirth is slow in coming, it is a common custom to put salt and onion into the mother's hand so that she can smell them, and she is given some mint leaves to chew. Sometimes a very hot tortilla is placed on the right side of the abdomen and pressed down by the midwife. In very delayed cases some midwives insert their hands to try to pull out the afterbirth.

The afterbirth is buried under the hearth. It is believed that if it is left anywhere else, the baby's face will swell; if it is thrown into the corral, as some do, it may cause *daño;* if it is eaten by a dog, the mother will die. The umbilical cord is cut with a scissors about 4 or 5 fingers away from the child. The remaining cord is tied with a thread and burned with a few drops of wax from a tallow candle. The wax is applied every day until the cord drops off. The umbilical cord is generally kept inside the house and saved to be later used in the treatment of some eye diseases. Some sell the cord to *curanderos* for about twenty-five centavos each. Many believe that only the umbilical cord of the first child or the first son is effective. When a child is born in a caul, it is said he will be rich. The caul is carefully saved for good luck.

Only an occasional woman in Tepoztlán has her child delivered by a doctor. Somewhat more frequently he is called in after delivery if there is some difficulty. The high cost of calling a doctor from Cuernavaca [11] made it prohibitive for the great majority of the families. However, even those with money do not generally call a doctor, particularly a male doctor. The prudishness and suspiciousness of the women are a major inhibiting factor. Women who have used a doctor have become the target of much malicious gossip.

The following quotation from a woman of one of the large barrios is an example of the nature of the gossip, in this case concerning a local schoolteacher. "First she called a *curandero,* and her baby was born, and everything was fine. But she sent for a doctor just to have him feel her, to play with her because that is what she wanted. The midwife said that when the doctor arrived he uncovered the patient and put in his hand and after he played with her he sewed her up. Then he grabbed the baby by the belly and he had it hang that way as though it were his toy. He could have killed him! But that is what they wanted. As for me, for nothing in the

[11] Now there is a doctor in the village.

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171 [843] [847] pec, a metal object is also worn for protection during an eclipse. The use of herbs and other remedies to produce abortions is also reported for Tzintzuntzan, Cherán, Mitla, and Tehuantepec. In Chan Kom a partition is put up in the room before delivery. The use of prenatal and postnatal massage, and during delivery, is mentioned in the monographs on Tzintzuntzan, Cherán, Chan Kom, and Tehuantepec. In Mitla the flow of blood after birth is encouraged by an herbal preparation. The application of heat during a difficult delivery is mentioned in Tzintzuntzan, Cherán, and Chan Kom. Putting the mother on a blanket to hasten the birth occurs in Tzintzuntzan, Cherán, and Mitla; the inducement of vomiting for the same reason is practiced in Tzintzuntzan and Tehuantepec. In Cherán, Mitla, and Chan Kom certain drinks are given which probably result in vomiting, but this is not specifically stated by the authors.

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[846] The use of sweatbaths during confinement is common in Mitla, and small infants are also sometimes so bathed. Hot tallow is dropped on the umbilicus in Tzintzuntzan and Tehuantepec, and the umbilical cord is used as a remedy for sore eyes in Mitla. In Cherán lemon juice is dropped into the infant's eyes. Finally, the burying of the after-birth under the hearth is practiced in Tzintzuntzan, Cherán, and Chan Kom. In Mitla and Tehuantepec it is buried elsewhere. In Tehuantepec the mother is bound and a "doll" is placed over the abdomen, to prevent the "matrix from falling out of place."

171 846 A comparison of the period of postnatal confinement, which is so important in Tepoztlán, also shows some similarity. In Tzintzuntzan and Cherán, some share the widespread belief that women should not go out or resume work until after forty days. But a woman in Tzintzuntzan may sit up in bed after three days and often goes out after three weeks. In Cherán a mother stays in bed from eight to fifteen days and may leave the house after twenty days. In Mitla there is no set confinement period, but it is usually not longer than fifteen days. In Chan Kom, the mother "must stay in her hammock for a week, remain quiet for two weeks, and after three weeks she may go out into the street." [16] In Tehuantepec the midwife visits the mother in seven days, and the mother goes to *sacamiss* in forty days.

171 84 It is difficult to say to what extent these similarities are due to contacts between these groups before the Conquest, or to the common exposure to Spanish colonial influences. A full comparison of our material on Tepoztlán with that of the foregoing groups is not always easy or possible because of the unequal coverage and treatment of the material. For the same reason, it is difficult to compare the psychological significance of practices that appear similar.

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 183.